STAR CANCELS OF DELAWARE COUNTY, NEW YORK

Delaware County, New York, is a rural area in the Catskill Mountains. It has no cities. The total population of the county in 1875 was 42,054. Most Nineteenth Century residents were farmers, but some worked in logging, wood chemical processing, and stone quarrying. Mail volume was generally low. Post offices were usually in a home or the community general store, with the shopkeeper doubling as postmaster. Postmasters there, as other rural areas, were on their own in contriving or purchasing canceling devices; the government did not pay for these items. As early as the 1860s, some postmasters decorated the corks they used to cancel stamps with hand-carved stars.

Delaware County

In the late 1870s through the early 1890s star cancels were very popular in Delaware County, as elsewhere in the nation. Commercially made star canceling devices, most duplexed with a town/date circular date stamp (CDS), were available through several different companies that advertised in the *U.S. Postal Guide*. Postmasters who still used cork cancels followed the trend by carving their corks in star shapes.

Star cancels began to lose popularity both in the county and nationwide in the last decade of the Nineteenth Century, and only a handful are reported nationally after 1900. North Franklin is the only post office in Delaware County known to have used star cancels in the Twentieth Century, and these are reported only from 1916.

Rural postmasters in this period were paid very little. Postmasters were frugal out of necessity. Small post offices often used the same device for several years, even after signs of wear were quite evident. Starting in 1879, Post Office regulations required the use of black ink to obliterate the stamp. This rule was widely ignored by thrifty postmasters using up whatever ink was on hand.

Delhi, Four-Pointed Cork Solid Star, 1860s. The county seat, Delhi's 1860 population was 919.

In this exhibit the easily-carved four-pointed stars are shown first, then five-pointed stars, and, finally, six-pointed stars.